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ABSTRACT

A 20-item questionnaire determined and compared attitudes of 996 public school teachers and administrators in 83 rural Tennessee counties concerning curriculum development, course content, school environment, individualized instruction, philosophical parameters, student evaluation, and extracurricular activities. Both teachers and administrators agreed that homework was necessary for good instructional programs, the main purpose of schools was to teach basic skills, materials should be selected in relation to established objectives, diplomas should only be given to students passing the Tennessee proficiency test, ability grouping was the most efficient and effective means for individualizing instruction, high school education should result in marketable skills, the best teaching occurs when teachers work as teams, strict discipline improves the learning environment, needs of exceptional children should be met through the curriculum, students should master grade requirements before being promoted, and effort should be considered with achievement when assigning grades. More teachers than administrators indicated that course content should be determined by teachers or cooperatively by teachers and students, and that art and music were as important as other academic subjects. More administrators than teachers that felt leadership in curriculum was the major administrator responsibility, athletic programs were essential, and extracurricular activities were vital to the total curriculum. (NEC)

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ATTITUDES TOWARD CURRICULUM ISSUES AMONG RURAL EDUCATORS IN TENNESSEE

A Research Study Presented at the
Thirteenth Annual Meeting of the
Mid-South Educational Research Association
in New Orleans, LA, on November 13, 1984

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ATTITUDES TOWARD CURRICULUM ISSUES AMONG RURAL EDUCATORS IN TENNESSEE

Introduction

The Tennessee State Board of Education requires that curriculum revision and development be an annual process resulting in a plan for improving instruction. The curriculum framework for local school systems is specified by law. State Board of Education regulations state that:

> The State Board of Education shall establish broad goals and objectives for the instructional areas. The goals of education as set forth by the State Board of Education including the goals and objectives established for elementary, middle or junior high and high school shall constitute the state curriculum framework and shall provide basis for curriculum planning in local systems. School systems shall base instructional programs upon the curriculum framework. The State Department of Education shall develop curriculum guides based upon the established curriculum framework. Each of these guides shall list specific goals and objectives, organizational requirements such as grade placement or sequence, lists of essential topics, skills, concepts and an evaluation plan. Local school systems shall utilize the curriculum guides made available by the State Department of Education or shall submit comparable guides to be approved by the State Board of Education on the recommendation of the Commissioner of Education prior to implementation.
> (Rules, Regulations and Minimum Standards for the Governance of Public Schools in the State of Tennessee, 1984, p. 34).

There are a number of public school systems in Tennessee which serve a predominantly rural clientele. Rural education poses unique concerns and opportunities because of size, philosophy, and oftentimes, a scarcity of resources and support personnel. Recently, there has been increased concern for improving rural schools. Therefore, the attitudes held by rural educators is important for a better understanding of curriculum matters in the rural environment.

Statement of the Problem

This study involved a determination and comparison of the attitudes of rural public school teachers and administrators in Tennessee concerning pertinent curriculum issues.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant because teachers and administrators are actively involved in the planning and implementation of local school curricula. It is generally agreed that the perceptions held by building level educators measurably influence what occurs instructionally. Student needs can best be served by a school program supported by well qualified personnel and a diversified curriculum. The information extrapolated from the data in this study is useful in planning and implementing curriculum improvement.

Research Procedures

A questionnaire was used to determine the attitudes of public school teachers and administrators concerning selected curricular issues in seven categories: curriculum development, course content, school environment, individualized instruction, philosophical parameters, student evaluation, and extracurricular activities. Those counties in Tennessee with a population of less than 40,000 were categorized as rural for the purposes of the study. (1980 Census) Questionnaires were distributed to 996 educators in eighty-three counties. The Statistical Analysis System was used to analyze the data. The Chi Square technique was used to determine the level of significance of the data.

1. Course content should be decided by the teacher who is teaching the class.

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	C.S.	Sig.(.05)
Administrator	21	13	32	20	94	59	13	8	61.0923	S
Teacher	97	15	329	51	193	30	29	4		

Approximately two-thirds of the teachers believed that course content should be decided by the teacher teaching the class. Conversely, two-thirds of the school administrators disagreed.

2. Homework is necessary for a good instructional program.

Administrator	38	23	71	44	40	25	11	7	11.9878	S
Teacher	212	33	300	46	94	15	42	6		

Some two-thirds of the teachers and three-fourths of the school administrators thought that homework is necessary for a good instructional program.

3. The main purpose of schools is to teach the basic skills.

Administrator	21	13	103	64	31	19	5	3	27.9948	S
Teacher	45	7	481	74	122	19	0	0		

Both teachers and administrators agreed that the main purpose of schools is to teach the basic skills.

4. The best way to develop curriculum is to establish goals and objectives-and then select books, materials and teaching strategies that will be effective in the realization of those goals.

Administrator	35	22	94	59	18	11	13	8	70.7264	S
Teacher	352	54	246	38	43	7	7	1		

Most of the respondents agreed that materials should be selected in relation to established goals and objectives.

5. Course content should be determined jointly by the teacher and students.

Administrator	0	0	48	30	82	51	30	19	42.3213	S
Teacher	20	3	328	51	258	40	42	6		

The administrators disagreed with the concept that course content should be determined cooperatively by teachers and students. Only 54 percent of the teachers agreed that this would be desirable.

6. A high school diploma should only be given to those who have passed the state mandated proficiency test.

Administrator	40	25	70	44	47	29	3	2	5.0975	N.S.
Teacher	165	25	245	38	201	31	37	5		

Both groups were of the opinion that a high school diploma should be granted only to those passing the proficiency test mandated by Tennessee law.

7. The most important role of the principal is his/her leadership in curriculum.

Administrator	35	22	97	61	20	13	8	5	70.2562	S
Teacher	102	16	201	31	186	29	159	25		

School administrators felt that leadership in curriculum was a major job responsibility. A majority of the teachers responding did not agree.

8. A strong athletic program is essential in the total educational development of many students.

Administrator	21	13	122	76	10	6	7	4	175.9840	S
Teacher	55	8	160	25	378	58	55	8		

Nearly 90 percent of the administrators in the study perceived the athletic program to be essential. Two-thirds of the teachers did not accept this premise.

9. Ability grouping is the most efficient and effective means for individualizing instruction.

Administrator	38	24	94	59	16	10	12	8	11.3951	S
Teacher	141	22	356	55	127	20	24	4		

There was general agreement on this issue.

10. The goal of education should be to enable each child to develop a marketable skill by the end of high school.

Administrator	31	19	66	41	63	39	0	0	19.6095	S
Teacher	108	17	273	42	201	31	66	10		

A majority of both groups supported the idea that a marketable skill should be the result of a high school education.

11. The best teaching takes place when teachers work as teams.

Administrator	26	16	67	42	63	39	4	2	12.7072	S
Teacher	162	25	246	38	194	30	46	7		

Both groups adhered to the philosophy that the best teaching is when teachers work as teams.

12. Students should be taught that individuals representing all cultural, economic, and racial backgrounds have made important contributions to the growth and development of this country.

Administrator	80	50	73	46	5	3	2	1	12.0621	S
Teacher	239	37	341	53	44	7	24	4		

A preponderance of the teachers and administrators revealed that individuals representing diverse cultures have contributed to the development of this country.

13. Art and music are important to the development of the student as other academic areas.

Administrator	29	18	31	19	83	52	17	11	68.3163	S
Teacher	156	24	307	47	147	23	38	6		

The administrators did not agree that art and music are as important as other academic subjects. However, the teacher group felt otherwise.

14. Course content should be determined by a written course of study that is adhered to by every teacher in the system.

Administrator	38	24	112	70	10	6	0	0	38.4048	S
Teacher	98	15	360	56	160	25	30	5		

A total of 94 percent of the administrators said that teachers should follow a written course of study. Some two-thirds of the teachers agreed that this would be sound policy.

15. Teachers have the responsibility for providing input into the total educational program within a school system.

Administrator	12	8	39	24	92	58	17	11	211.1087	S
Teacher	151	23	398	61	60	9	39	6		

Most teachers (84 percent) expressed support for teachers involvement in the total educational program. Over two-thirds of the administrators did not agree that teachers have a responsibility for providing input into the total educational program within the school system.

16. Strict discipline creates a good environment for learning.

Administrator	69	43	73	46	12	8	6	4	75.8564	S
Teacher	87	13	396	61	91	14	74	11		

There was agreement among both groups that strict discipline improves the environment for learning.

17. The curriculum should be designed to meet the needs of children of varied exceptionalities.

Administrator	43	27	100	62	16	10	1	0	12.5021	S
Teacher	111	17	474	73	63	10	0	0		

The groups readily agreed that the needs of exceptional children should be met through the curriculum.

18. A student should not be promoted to a higher grade until he/she has mastered the requirements of their present grade.

Administrator	34	21	99	62	23	14	4	2	2.8823	N.S.
Teacher	116	18	400	62	98	15	34	5		

Basic agreement existed that students should master the requirements of their present grades before being promoted.

19. Grades should be based entirely on achievement rather than a combination of effort and achievement.

Administrator	18	11	23	14	94	59	25	16	23.5209	S
Teacher	43	7	88	14	479	74	38	6		

There was mutual consent between the administrators and teachers that effort should be considered with achievement when assigning grades.

20. Extra-curricular activities are a vital part of the total curriculum of the school.

Administrator	23	14	95	59	21	13	21	13	60.9581	S
Teacher	55	8	237	36	304	47	52	8		

The administrator sample favored extra-curricular activities. Interestingly, a majority (55 percent) of the teachers thought that extra-curricular activities were not vital to the success of the total curriculum.

Summary Statement

The findings provided through this study should be helpful in curriculum planning and the development of an environment for effective curriculum decision-making in rural school systems.